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AUTHOR	Douglass, Susan
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ABSTRACT

The Council on Islamic Education (CIE) is a nonprofit resource organization comprised of a diverse body of scholars of history, education, religion, and related disciplines. CIE strives to improve the U.S. K-12 education system by fostering the cultivation of knowledge, critical thinking, and global awareness among the nation's young citizens. CIE researches and publishes supplementary materials and teaching resources based on current scholarship in content areas related to Islam and Muslim history, world history/geography, and the humanities. The American Textbook Council has released an online report, "Islam and the Textbooks," which advertises being a part of a comprehensive textbook review on world history. The report, however, deals with brief selections from six books and does not systematically compare coverage of Islam in the books. The report produced an essay about Islam instead of a report about textbooks. This paper considers the council's report, examining its methods, its focus, and what it considers to the reports errors. The paper discusses the reports complaints about world history and about the inclusion of women in world history textbooks. It also finds that the report, in discussing the textbooks' treatment of legal systems in world history, reveals an ignorance of legal history in Muslim societies or the West. The paper contends that the report relies too much on information obtained from Bernard Lewis's, "What Went Wrong," an outdated modernization theory. It continues by discussing the report's allegations that CIE has consistently allied itself with people who take an antagonistic view of the U.S. and Western civilization. It concludes by considering history teaching vs. polemics. (BT)

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Response to the American Textbook Council Report "Islam and the Textbooks"

What is the Council on Islamic Education?

Founded in 1990, the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) is a non-profit resource organization comprised of a diverse body of scholars of history, education, religion and related disciplines. CIE strives for improvement of the American K-12 education system by fostering the cultivation of knowledge, critical thinking, and global awareness among our nation's young citizens.

To achieve this mission, CIE provides services and resources based on high standards of scholarship to K-12 school textbook publishers, education officials, curriculum developers and teachers. CIE helps educators to cover world history and related subject matter in a pedagogically effective, balanced manner that meets the requirements of state and national standards. This includes covering world faiths according to accepted constitutional guidelines for teaching about religion in public schools as articulated by the First Amendment Center. CIE's approach is to contribute to the effort to educate all young people, not to lobby on behalf of a few. To this end, the organization maintains long-term interaction with diverse participants at many levels of the national education discourse. CIE has published analyses, articles and reports on curriculum issues and trends in history/social science education, as well as teaching resources. These can be viewed, at www.cie.org. CIE scholars have participated in curriculum and standards development, served as academic reviewers on well over a dozen textbook projects, and conducted in-service teacher workshops nationwide, helping educators identify faulty or inadequate information in textbooks and be better prepared to teach about world religions and world history/geography. CIE researches and publishes supplementary materials and teaching resources based on current scholarship in content areas related to Islam and Muslim history, world history/geography and the humanities. CIE educators participate annually in national and regional education conferences as invited speakers and exhibitor. CIE has convened four special conferences, allowing educators to share expertise and diverse perspectives, and communicating their views to textbook publishers, state education officials, and leaders of professional education organizations. CIE also disseminates information about the US education system by hosting visiting international scholars, officials and dignitaries through the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the U.S. State Department.

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The Council on Islamic Education's Response to the American Textbook Council Report, "Islam and the Textbooks"

Gilbert Sewall embodies almost by himself the American Textbook Council, who has been criticizing American education as inadequately rigorous, culturally inappropriate, and damaging to Western civilizational values for over a decade. Sewall has now released an online report entitled "Islam and the Textbooks," (www.historytextbooks.org/islam.htm) which he advertises as part of a "comprehensive textbook review" on world history. To begin with, it is not comprehensive, since it only deals with brief selections from six books of the dozen currently used in US classrooms. He does not systematically compare coverage of Islam in the books, nor does he compare textbooks to mandated state curriculum standards. If the report did that, it ought to be called "Islam in the Textbooks."

As his actual title indicates, however, Sewall has produced an essay about Islam instead of a report about textbooks. The essay expresses his opinion of Islam and Muslim history, and then compares a few paragraphs from the textbooks to his opinions. Not surprisingly, Sewall finds that the textbooks do not fully represent his own negative view of Islam. On that basis, he concludes that the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) is responsible for lies, censorship, and malicious distortion that appear in the textbooks. Sewall accuses publishers and organizations that have dared to associate with CIE of being weak-kneed tools of the organization at best, and at worst, somehow disloyal to American ideals. He also asserts that positive coverage of Islam and other non-Western civilizations is "plaguing the teaching of Western civilization."(p. 23)

The American Textbook Council's online report does not address the full range of coverage on Islam and Muslim regions in history and geography textbooks. It deals with a selection of hot-button topics, and juxtaposes the textbook passages with opinions from a handful of mainly post-9/11 books on Islam. It is telling that in a 35-page report, Sewall takes no exception to coverage of Islam's basic beliefs and practices in the textbooks, and reports no signs of censorship. One must therefore assume he finds it generally sound. This ought to deflect his condemnation of the Council on Islamic Education somewhat, and give credit to the publishers as well. True to his decade-old complaint that little is right with US education, however, he grants educators as little quarter as he does CIE.

Sewall's essay touches upon only four selected topics—women, slavery, Islamic law and jihad. Sewall's method is to quote a passage here or there and then to state what the books ought to say. He sidesteps serious discussion about the actual texts with vague generalizations such as "Much of this passage can be disputed, but facts aside…" (p. 18), or claims that "the passage mixes fact and fiction," and states that "these statements are not exactly inaccurate but they are highly misleading."(p. 16) He never disputes the passages in historical terms, nor argues persuasively why they are fictitious or

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inaccurate. He consistently fails to tell the reader what period of history is being described in the passages, and often leaps from the distant past to contemporary Muslim societies without distinction. He engages in a pointless argument about whether slavery practiced by Muslims was worse or better than American and European slavery. With 20/20 hindsight, he faults textbooks published long before 9/11 with having papered over what he considers to be the central concept of jihad, which he would define as a license to commit violence and aggression without limits. He neglects to consider that mainstream Muslim legal opinion considers the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 to be a criminal act, and not a form of jihad, which is confined to limited, just warfare, but excludes aggression and any type of wanton violence directed at the public. He also fails to note that neither textbooks nor CIE reviewers argue that every military campaign in Muslim history fit the description of jihad given in Islamic teachings. Sewall considers violence to be such an integral part of Islam, and jihad such a central concept to the faith, that the very first mention of Islam in his report asks educators to resolve "how classrooms deal with Islamic aggression." (emphasis added, p. 5) Off topic, he faults the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), whose resource guides for helping students through the national crisis appeared on states' department of education web sites in the hours after the 9/11 attacks. He accuses the NASP of inducing a tolerant and apologetic atmosphere that downplayed the threat posed by Islam and Muslims. Such proactive positions taken by NASP, schools and teachers in fact deserve much of the credit for preserving civil order in the days following the attacks. The U.S. did not share the fate of Gujarat, India.

Surprisingly for an advocate of improving history education, Sewall's analysis makes no distinction between historical periods or geographic diversity in outlining how Islam should be covered. Most of the thirty-five pages consists of an indictment of Islam that is more thorough than his assessment of flaws in textbook coverage. For example, he tells the reader how guilty Islam, Muslims, or Arabs are for the Middle East morass, but he does not quote a single textbook passage that illustrates what students are told about the modern Middle East, and whether they diverge from his version of the truth. In fact, Mr. Sewall should be delighted. He would be hard pressed to find a textbook presentation of the Middle East conflict that could be construed as pro-Arab, though some exhibit a bit more balance than they did a decade ago.

Complaints about World History in the Classroom

Sewall's attacks on teaching about Islam in world history are emblematic of his broader concerns, and he often strays from his topic to more general complaints about history education. "World history textbooks hold Islam and other non-Western civilizations to different standards than those that apply to the West." (p. 27) Not just Muslim but also non-Muslim "domestic educational activists" are revisionists who "insist on harsh perspectives for the West while gilding the record of non-Western civilizations." (p.

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28) Sewall puts Islam in the crosshairs, but he cannot resist invoking issues he has visited in the past. For example, he reminds the reader of his opposition to what he calls "the highly contestable 'Three Worlds Meet' concept of American history." (p. 15) According to this argument, Europeans, Africans and Native Americans were not "equally significant in the development of the nation and culture." In his lingo, they were not *culturally equivalent*. Other essays by Sewall reveal that he finds Europeans, Africans and Native Americans so culturally unequal that they shouldn't share a headline in US history curriculum. He must be especially horrified, then, that many African slaves brought to the New World were Muslims, and that Muslims accompanied some European explorers from Spain or Portugal, not to mention Muslim transfers of navigation technology that helped get them to America. To Sewall, positive coverage of Islam is merely another example of the ills of multiculturalism and cultural equivalency. He invokes dire warnings about falsifying the past (p. 28), and equates that with the idea of cultural equivalency. Sewall claims that the dangerous idea of Western and non-Western cultural equivalency makes "American students lose the chance to compare American and 'Western' constitutional values—favorably, one would hope, even triumphantly—to other political systems and ideologies." (page 28, emphasis added) For one thing, history standards require a great deal more than study of political systems and ideologies. His use of the term "triumphant" in describing the desirable pedagogical outcome of the contrast between the West and America on the one hand, and the non-West (also known as the rest of the world) takes us back to the halcyon days in American education when textbooks were not sullied and complicated by convincing descriptions of the world beyond Europe's shores and ours. Statements about cultural equivalency and triumphalism may cause some readers to ask where exactly the Clash of Civilizations resides—with those abroad who supposedly all hate us, or with some at home who love themselves without moderation?

Where Do Women Fit Into World History Textbooks?

Another persistent theme is textbooks' inclusion of women. Sewall complains that "world history textbooks contort themselves to include women in history and amplify their accomplishments" and "invent obstacles to their achievement." (p. 17) He wants textbooks to downplay impediments to women's advancement here, but highlight other cultures' treatment of women "that would be considered backward, unacceptable or even revolting in the West."(emphasis added, p. 17). Textbook passages on Muslim women disturb him because they include factual material about rights that Islamic teachings granted to women, as a set of beliefs and norms for social life. He considers as "false claims" the ideals of Islamic marriage that spouses should treat each other with kindness, and those concerning women's right to her dowry, to inherit, to buy and sell property, and enjoy legal personhood. He objects to textbooks making a distinction between religious beliefs and lived experience. He dismisses scholars' consensus

about the varied historical situation of Muslim women during 1400 years, including evidence of women's ownership of property, recourse to courts, education, contributions to charity and scholarship, and rulership (p. 19), alongside oppression and obstacles to their full participation in public life. He rejects textbooks' inclusion of earlier or modern female politicians like NATO member Turkey's former prime minister Tansu Çiller. He finds that inclusion of such figures "deforms and cheapens world history," (p. 20) and regrets that "such gender conventions" distort coverage of "all civilizations and centuries." (p. 20) Would he also object to mention of Corazon Aqino, Elizabeth Dole, Margaret Thatcher, or even Good Queen Bess I or II? Sewall is astounded at "the callousness" (p. 18) of a sentence describing Muslim peasant women's contributions to the rural economy over the centuries. Would he find equally "callous" common textbook pictures of French peasant women working in wheat fields, like the *Tres Riche Heures* of the Duc de Berry, the 15th century illuminated manuscript that documents women's everyday contributions to the rural economy? If inclusion of women in world history textbooks represents a kind of undesirable affirmative action to Sewall, then at least we have a case for cross-cultural equivalency, in which Western and non-Western women alike are unnecessary to understanding the world, and by their presence distort the real picture.

What does Sewall propose to substitute for covering positive aspects of Islamic beliefs about women and other matters? He wants coverage to be either black or white, with no shades of gray: "What is missing from textbooks is…that Muslim women today are…not much more than chattel…women are fit to be servants and breeders…a wife's autonomy is interpreted as a sign of female disobedience and disrespect." He describes Moroccan Berber men "selling their daughters" "sheathed in burqas [sic]," condemned to "serve, obey and breed." (all page 20) Who is Gilbert Sewall to tell half a billion Muslim women in the world that their condition is mainly "wretched"? The many highly educated American Muslim women, and Arab, Indian, Malaysian, European or African Muslim women who are doctors, lawyers, professors, and also wives and mothers, need not accept this nasty characterization that he wants to serve up in textbooks as undisputed fact.

Legal Systems in World History

On *Shari'ah*, or the tradition of Islamic law, Sewall condemns straightforward but simple descriptions written at a middle school reading level as "cryptic," "vague and abstract," or lacking in sufficient "commentary." He is not even satisfied with the lengthy reading on *shari'ah* in a textbook for which Bernard Lewis, whom he often quotes in the report, served as area studies consultant (p. 19), a fact Sewall apparently does not realize. In fact, that textbook is unique for its historically grounded discussion of the topic. Sewall rejects the idea of studying religiously derived law altogether, because "Holy law is not a variant of jurisprudence as it is known in the U.S. and Western democracies." "*It is not a legal*

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system as Americans understand it." (Sewall's emphasis, p. 14). It is a pity that Muslims living 1400 years ago, and Jews or Christians two millennia ago, were not aware of Sewall's verdict, or they might have rejected holy law right then and there. Apart from the way in which these shrill judgments reveal his ignorance of legal history in Muslim societies or the West, one wonders if Sewall would dare to mount such an attack on Jewish holy law and its application today.

Sewall does not once demonstrate appreciation for the fact that textbooks today are only one resource used by the best classroom teachers, nor does he acknowledge the difficulty in producing textbooks as wide-angle, introductory works. He has more often held them and their publishers up to ridicule than he has offered useful criticism. Sewall's history books, however, would overlook variations, subtleties and historical differentiation and go straight to ideologically favored views of history. If he thinks current books look at non-Western cultures through rose-colored glasses, he would have them view other cultures through the wrong end of the telescope. The dictatorial approach he advocates gives neither teachers nor students credit for being able to think, and would instead have textbooks tell them what to think. In the case of Islam, he would have them tell students that Islam as a religion and Muslims as a cultural group, are mainly backward and dangerous, and that its values are utterly foreign to our own. Fortunately, such one-sided examples of rote—and inaccurate—learning would violate all state requirements for skill acquisition in information gathering, analysis, and evaluation of historical evidence to form opinions about its reliability. Not a single state requires students to study the past solely to measure its value against our own time and place. The value of history cannot be gained by studying world societies that existed long ago—or indeed our own shorter national history—in order to judge everything and everyone according to prevailing norms of today, and to jeer at those we today consider odd, backward, or even morally wrong. That in itself is a backward, myopic view of the past. It would force us to negate the achievements of ancient Greece because of its treatment of women and of slaves, to deny any contributions of Rome because of its treatment of slaves, gladiator contests, and early Christians. By such a standard of coverage, unfavorable historical episodes in European and American history, or unfavorable actions by individuals negate anything of value those societies or individuals represented. Sewall himself objects to Western civilization being harshly judged for its shortcomings. If he is so convinced about the supremacy of Western civilizational values, then positive coverage of other societies should not be considered a threat to the comparison. Such all-or-nothing views do little to further knowledge that would enable American citizens to live productively in a globalizing world society, or to foster any sense of common human heritage and purpose among the diverse groups of people who share our nation.

Sewall frequently invokes the importance of values education in history studies. Conducting an evaluation of cultures is quite different from studying the values that human beings express. The notion of

cultural inequality as a basis for designing history education may too easily imply that less valuable cultures should be omitted from the curriculum or shortchanged in coverage. If the U.S. is to serve as an example to the world, then its students should learn that to communicate and cooperate with people from other cultures at home and abroad, we must seek common ideals and principles. Study of history invites comparison of ideals with practice over time, whether it cuts close to home or faraway. The Council on Islamic Education encourages such analyses in its reviews, including critiques of Muslim history based on sound scholarship and a clear understanding of foundational beliefs and principles of Islam. The problem with coverage of Islam, as Sewall correctly quotes Fred Donner, is that Islamic beliefs and practices and have not been accurately or adequately represented in textbooks until very recently. To understand any religious group, students first need to understand the actual teachings in sufficient detail, and then explore evidence and examples of actual historical situations related to those beliefs. In any case, there is no place for ideological or myopic views based on the present. On the other hand, it is surely biased to compare the ideals of one's own society to the historical record of another. By doing so, students would reach a distorted conclusion about which is "better," or even if other cultures, religions and groups are worthy of "human fellowship," to quote Sewall's phrase (p. 30). Studying history to discover the ideas and values of past and recent times does not mean evaluating every time, place and society solely in terms of its similarity to contemporary American society and its ideals of government and culture. Sewall seems certain, for example, that because no Muslim was present at the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, that "civil society, separation of church and state, limited government, an independent judiciary" as well as "notions of personal liberty and individual freedom and freedom of religion <u>are alien concepts</u>" to Islam, along with "due process, trial by jury, and chartered protection." (p. 14) Students and teachers in many of today's world history classes are sophisticated enough to know that such blanket condemnations of other societies blind the student to understanding common values that may be expressed in other languages, different terminology, and different institutions. Sewall has clearly not surveyed the broad array of scholarship on Islam in Western languages that would give the lie to such a statement anyway. He relies on Bernard Lewis' *What Went Wrong* for his information, and Lewis' answer to his own rhetorical question is that "Islam" did not become like "the West." This is outdated modernization theory at its worst, according to which nations that did not follow Western prescriptions or Western patterns of development are failures, and can become successful only by becoming as Western as we are. Sewall calls Lewis' assessment of Islam "nothing but accurate" (p. 22). Many other historians of the region beg to differ, but if states want to take *What Went Wrong* through the adoption process as a standard text, then let the democratic process do its work. In the meantime, publishers are required to submit textbooks for adoption that meet existing legislatively approved state requirements for coverage of all religions and cultures. But many of these are not to Sewall's liking, because in his view they have been contaminated

"from Sacramento, California to Richmond, Virginia" by "pro-Islamic initiatives." (p. 26) This ludicrous charge is an insult to the forty-eight state legislatures and departments of education between the Pacific and the Atlantic.

Applying Constitutional Principles in the American Public Square

The Council on Islamic Education has engaged the issue of teaching about religion in public schools on the basis of constitutional guidelines worked out mainly by Christian theologians and constitutional lawyers, and disseminated to the schools over nearly twenty years by Charles C. Haynes, Senior Scholar of the First Amendment Center.[1] The study *Teaching About Religion in National and State Social Studies Standards* (co-published by CIE and the First Amendment Center, 2000), describes treatment of all of major religions in world history, and also in US history, civics, economics and geography. The topic of the study is not Islam, but the constitutional and legislative basis for teaching about religion, and its implications for excellence in history education. The study finds that state history standards require sound teaching about U.S. and world religion, and that their mandates generally meet the First Amendment guidelines. In his report, Sewall attacks the First Amendment Center, an organization highly respected for its championing of civic engagement on unifying principles and civil discourse in the American public arena. He lumps Haynes and his organization with those "credulous" education groups "that entertain romantic views of the Third World and skeptical views of the U.S." (p. 27-28), and claims it is naively "enabling" CIE, and fails to realize that dealing with Muslims must involve "contradictions with their own principles." Sewall characterizes all academics and journalists with whom CIE has "consistently allied itself" as people who "take an antagonistic view of the U.S. and Western civilization." (p. 26) He reserves particular harshness for textbook editors, characterizing them in a sinister manner as "collaborators" (p. 28) who "do the Council's bidding." He points the finger at executive editors whose textbooks were reviewed by CIE, listing them by their full names. Fortunately, he did not include their home addresses. The price of disagreeing with Gilbert Sewall's view of the world is high indeed.

In making his arguments, Sewall insults the intelligence of both editors and teachers, denigrating those who labor in this field. He accuses editors of purveying "evasions and lies in lessons involving the Third World," of "suspending or contradicting their principles," "doctoring and altering history" (p. 29), infecting textbooks with "distortions and evasions."(p. 31), and being "co-operative and acquiescent" (p. 26) to the cynical machinations of multicultural advocates. He says teachers have "faint knowledge of Islam," and "try to avoid all aspects of the subject" of religion; "sedated by happy textbook talk," they are

[1] These guidelines are published in *Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education* by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas (First Amendment Center, 1994-2001).

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"complacent" and readily accepting of "shallow and false information." (pp. 5, 30) Positive coverage of other societies in textbooks, he states, "make it difficult or impossible for teachers and students to grasp the broad nature of global security and geopolitical conflict." (p. 30) Mercifully, Sewall acquits educators of being "anti-American." (p. 30) With such patronizing, we would expect him to employ his unique understanding to enlighten editors and educators by working on actual textbooks. In over a decade as a critic of curriculum and textbooks, Sewall has not engaged in academic review of a single textbook on the market. That is hard work on a tight schedule. He has been content to act as an armchair quarterback, condemning all he sees with broad sweeps of the hand.

History Teaching vs. Polemics

Council on Islamic Education textbook reviewers make their arguments about balanced and accurate coverage by citing a variety of primary and secondary sources, in a format that allows editors to make their own judgments about each suggestion. They are not merely content specialists for chapters on Islam, but as historians and social studies educators, they are qualified to serve as academic reviewers of entire textbooks. CIE reviewers have commented in every review about fair and accurate coverage of Christianity, Judaism and other world faiths as well as Islam, using First Amendment Center constitutional guidelines for teaching about religion. They have reviewed US history, civics and economics textbooks that contain no coverage of Islam whatsoever, and geography texts in which earth science and skills content are important, and Muslim regions are only a small part of the whole. Publishers have found CIE reviews worthwhile, because their comments sometimes run to dozens of pages on each unit, addressing everything from introductory geography to literature excerpts. CIE scholars have done a great deal of primary source research in order to help with requirements to teach about trade and economics, history of science and technology, arts and literature, and to integrate maps that span several civilizations. Their reviews make a case for sound pedagogy, interesting and clear writing, and current scholarship in books written for introductory students of history. To support the requirements of state standards, CIE has conducted ongoing studies of national and state standards, has published studies and articles, attended and held conferences with education officials, publishers and teachers. Aggressive demands, narrow concerns, shrill arguments and threats would certainly not gain any currency with experienced editors facing public scrutiny of their books, and would be cancelled out by others among the dozen academic and teacher reviewers of each textbook. Of course, Sewall would find this ominous and cynical, because he cannot imagine that Muslim educators and academics might have anything useful to contribute to American education.

The obvious goal of Sewall's attack on the Council on Islamic Education is to make the organization a pariah. He hopes to intimidate civic leaders, publishers, and educators into backing away.

In the guise of a report on textbooks, Sewall mounted personal attacks on those who work for and with the Council on Islamic Education. He seeks to demonize CIE's Director Shabbir Mansuri, distorting an interview, ridiculing his participation in civic forums, and libeling him with the suggestion that the organization has "warned scholars and public officials who do not sympathize with his requests that they will be perceived as racists, reactionaries, and enemies of Islam" (emphasis added, p. 25). Sewall knows well what he has implied with that statement, and he equally well knows it is a blatant lie. He adds to this the common device of charging outsiders with duplicity toward those they deal with, implying that Mansuri advises activists "to affect cordiality." Sewall's program is to use his public platform to exclude and demonize.

He claimed in his essay's conclusion that teaching about Islam should emphasize the threat to "national and international security." He labels all of modern Islam as "recrudescent," (p. 29) a returning sore or illness, according to *Webster's New Lexicon*. His dire warning of what will happen if coverage of Islam does not project the threat backward onto 1400 years of Muslim history is this worst-case scenario: "A failure to face this fact may tranquilize domestic anxiety and advance the idea of human fellowship." (emphasis added, p. 30) Correct coverage of Islam, then, must innoculate a generation against positive impressions that might let future citizens imagine sharing human fellowship with Muslims at home or abroad. His posture in the essay lies somewhere between Don Quixote tilting at multicultural windmills, and Torquemada inciting another Inquistion. Sewall quotes Fred Donner's critique of the modern revival of medieval calumny against Islam, but he contorts Donner's intent and fails to see its connection with his own requirements for textbook coverage. If calling a the religion of one fifth of humanity a returning illness or oozing sore is not demonization on the medieval scale, then nothing is.

In discussing Muslims in America and the Council on Islamic Education, Sewall emphasizes one of his usual themes as an educational critic, the question of "who are we" as a nation. Mr. Sewall puts in doubt the American-ness of those who work for Muslim organizations. All but one of the Muslim academics affiliated with CIE are either by birth or naturalization U.S. citizens, and many are native-born Muslim Americans. According to primary school civics lessons recommended in the *National Standards for Civics and Government*, holding certain religious beliefs is not a constitutional test for citizenship, nor is the fact of national origin a test of "belonging" to the nation as a naturalized citizen. The US Constitution today, especially through its historic amendments, has erased such degrees of citizenship and belonging to the nation. More than once in his essay, Mr. Sewall – unable to comprehend that Muslims are not all foreigners – implies that because some overseas Muslim governments are repressive, Muslim citizens in the U.S. are less deserving of constitutional guarantees and freedoms than citizens of other religions. A basic goal of civics instruction in our schools is to make it clear that American values and law do not permit discrimination on the basis of religion, neither in exercising freedom of speech or worship,

nor abridging the right to free association in legally established organizations such as CIE, whose legal status is a matter of public record, and which neither seeks nor accepts foreign funding.

Civic Participation in Difficult Times

How, then, can one be a Muslim and continue to live and function in America after September 11, 2001? Sewall lectures his readers on the real meaning of President Bush's call for tolerance and civil order—those adhering to the Islamic faith are supposed to be "apolitical Muslim citizens," because they may have "a belligerent Islamic agenda" (p. 5) that can be reasonably viewed by U.S. citizens as "militant goals" which "run counter to national and personal interest."(p. 6) He cites a scary domestic security essay about Muslim immigrants claiming that "domestic Muslims lack the ability and willingness to assimilate," which Sewall defines as "placing American constitutional values in front of their religion." (emphasis added, p. 6) According to the Pledge of Allegiance, we are "one nation under God," not over God.

Oddly, Sewall cites another commentator, who claims that "mainstream Islamic thought is in fact compatible with international law and orderly, peaceful interaction with non-Muslim nations." (p. 6) Sewall suggests, however, that the condition for peaceful interaction must lie in the fact that "Some Muslims are virtually secularized." Thus, a good Muslim is not really a Muslim at all. He notes darkly that the hearts and minds of all domestic Muslims "may favor resistance and separatism." His implication—Muslims had better be quiescent, apolitical, second-class citizens without institutions, away from the public square. To the contrary, were Muslims to dismantle their institutions of public participation and stay home, they would surely be accused of separatism and sinister isolation from the mainstream— "darned if you do and darned if you don't." He sees no possibility of sincerity, actual competency, and constructive contribution by Muslims, and accepts no common ground or shared values between Muslims and people of other faiths, not even among Muslims whose American roots go back many generations.

Sewall paints a portrait of an organization up to no good, and broaches no possibility of sincerity or contribution. Though he will not mention it, CIE reviewers adhere to the First Amendment constitutional guidelines for teaching about religion in the schools, which have been endorsed by a roster of religious, civic and education organizations and individuals. The Council on Islamic Education has earned its place at the table by proving that its participants are willing to work, and able to participate in a civil and comprehensive manner on a range of pedagogic, academic, and civic issues. The values and constitutional framework of the American public square provide for all of us, agreeing to disagree on any matter, following principles of civility in discourse. It is a violation of that sacred trust to seek to exclude others from that civic space because of their religion, race or ethnicity. Devoid of any special influence,

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the free exchange of ideas is the only tool employed by the Council on Islamic Education in its efforts to improve history and geography education. It is not an "agent of censorship" (p. 25) or malicious threats, but an organization working within the American system, and taking seriously its responsibility of promoting civil discourse and educational excellence within constitutional guidelines. If such action encourages human fellowship rather than civilizational conflict, then perhaps that will help Americans of all religions and ethnicities to understand that such engagement is also fully in accord with Islamic and universal principles and values.

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